

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
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R 101431Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6369
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 0179

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PBOR, PLO
SUBJECT: FAHUM CONVEYS WARNING TO THE WEST

1. SUMMARY: PNC CHAIRMAN KHALID FAHUM SAID MODERATES HAVE MAINTAINED CONTROL OF PLO IN SPITE OF DAMAGE CAUSED BY SADAT VISIT. PLO DOES NOT CARE WHO NEGOTIATES WITH ISRAELIS AS LONG AS THEY WITHDRAW FROM WEST BANK AND GAZA STRIP. IF SADAT ATTAINS STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES OUTLINED IN HIS KNESSET SPEECH, PLO WOULD FIND WAY TO PARTICIPATE IN NEGOTIATIONS. IF ISRAELIS REJECT WITHDRAWAL, PLO WILL RETURN TO THE GUN. USG IS MAKING TASK OF MODERATES IN PLO MORE DIFFICULT BY ITS STATEMENTS REJECTING PEACE PROCESS ROLE THE ORGANIZATION. END SUMMARY.
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2. TWO BRITISH PARLIAMENTARIANS SAW PNC CHAIRMAN KHALID FAHUM SEVERAL DAYS AGO AND DISCUSSED CURRENT STATE OF PLO. FAHUM SAID THAT MODERATES WERE STILL IN CONTROL BUT JUST BARELY SO. TO INCREASE CONTROL, MODERATES WERE MOVING IN DIRECTION OF REJECTIONISTS. FAHUM SPECULATED THAT IF SADAT CAN ATTAIN A DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES ALONG LINES SADAT

ENUMERATED IN KNESSET SPEECH THEN MODERATES WILL BE ABLE TO BRING PLO AROUND TO COOPERATE IN PEACE PROCESS. HOWEVER, IF SADAT COMES UP WITH ANYTHING LESS, THE CURRENT MODERATE LEADERSHIP HAS LIMITED CHANCE TO SURVIVE.

3. FAHUM WAS BITTER AT BRZEZINSKI'S STATEMENT REJECTING THE PLO AND SAID THIS PLAYED INTO HANDS OF PALESTINIAN REJECTIONISTS. IF MODERATES CANNOT HOLD THE LINE AND DO NOT GET HELP FROM SADAT AND THE WEST, THEN PLO WILL RETURN TO THE GUN REGARDLESS OF DAMAGE THIS WOULD DO TO LEGITIMACY OF PALESTINIAN CAUSE.

4. FAHUM TALKED TO AUSTRALIAN CHARGE JAN 7 AND EXPANDED ON HIS COMMENTS TO BRITISH. HE SAID THAT THE BOTTOM LINE IN ANY SETTLEMENT WITH THE ISRAELIS WAS THEIR WITHDRAWAL FROM THE WEST BANK AND GAZA. ROLE OF THE PLO AS AN ORGANIZATION IS TO LIBERATE THE OCCUPIED LAND, NOT RULE IT. IT DOES NOT MATTER WHO ACCOMPLISHES THE JOB OF GETTING THE ISRAELIS OUT. IF IT IS SADAT OR HUSSEIN, IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE TO THE PLO. ONLY THE OBJECTIVE IS IMPORTANT. FAHUM SAID THAT NO MATTER WHO LIBERATES THE WEST BANK, EVEN IF IT IS HUSSEIN, THE QUESTION OF RULING THE PALESTINIAN HOMELAND CAN BE WORKED OUT. HUSSEIN IS NOT ETERNAL AND CHANGES CAN BE MADE. FAHUM TALKED ABOUT THE ALLON PLAN AS OFFERING A BASIS FOR NEGOTIATION, BUT SAID BEGIN HAS RETREATED AND IS OFFERING NOTHING.

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5. FAHUM CRITICIZED SADAT BUT LESS INTENSIVELY THAN HE DID IN PREVIOUS MEETING. SADAT'S SIN IS THAT HE HAS STRENGTHENED BEGIN POLITICALLY BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD. THUS, BEGIN IS LESS ISOLATED THAN BEFORE.

6. FAHUM SAID PRESIDENT CARTER'S POSITION IN THE US CONGRESS IS WEAK AND THIS HAS UNDERMINED HIS ABILITY TO PUT PRESSURE ON ISRAEL. EVEN THOUGH SADAT'S INITIATIVE HAS UNDERCUT "JEWISH LOBBY" IN THE US, THE CONCOMITANT STRENGTHENING OF BEGIN'S HAND HAS KEPT THE PRESIDENT POWERLESS TO EFFECT A CHANGE IN ISRAEL'S POSITION.

7. FAHUM SAID THAT ARAFAT IS STILL BEING CRITICIZED BUT BY MOVING IN ALL DIRECTIONS AT ONCE HE HAS MANAGED TO STABILIZE HIS POSITION AND IS NOT NOW THREATENED. MODERATES IN PLO WERE DOING VERY WELL UNTIL SADAT'S VISIT TO JERUSALEM. VISIT SERIOUSLY UNDERCUT MODERATE POSITION ALTHOUGH SOME OF LOST GROUND IS BEING REGAINED.

8. FAHUM SAID PLO RELATIONS WITH SYRIA ARE EXTREMELY GOOD AND HE IS OPTIMISTIC THAT AGREEMENT IS BEING REACHED ON "CORRECT" IF NOT WARM RELATIONS BETWEEN SYRIA AND IRAQ.

MURPHY

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